Course Description

Can the methods of the natural sciences be used to study social phenomena? What particular problems does the fact that social science studies “humans” rather than “non-humans” pose for the methods we use to study them? And where did the social sciences (both the disciplines and the conceptual issues) come from historically? These are the animating questions of this course.

The class is divided into three units. We begin with an initial overview into the aims and history of the social sciences with examples from Anthropology, Political Science, Economics and Sociology. In the next unit we consider in detail how science forms a justification for belief, its structure, and the relation between theory and observation. In this unit also take up issues of causation and inference. In the third unit we look at the foundational claims of social science as a branch of the natural sciences and also encounter the critique that human intention and meaning make the methods of the natural sciences an incomplete model for studying social phenomenon.

The course presumes some background in social science.

Required Texts:


Recommended Text:

• Readings with an double asterisk below can be found through ares.wustl.edu
  i) Choose “Models of Social Science”
  ii) Enter the course password “popper” and click “Accept” after reading the copyright agreement.

**Course Requirements**

**20% Class Participation**
Class participation involves regular attendance, written completion of short study questions, and participation in class discussion.

**50% Take home exams.**
Take-home exams will be given out no later than one week before they are due (they may be e-mailed to you if distributed earlier). Please note that they will cover material through the due date of the exam.

25% Take-home exam 1: Friday, March 9, 12:00 Noon, Poli. Sci. office, Seigle Hall
25% Take-home exam 2: Friday, April 13, 12 Noon, Poli Sci office, Seigle Hall

**30% Final Paper**
A final paper of 1500-2000 words will be due by noon on May 7, 12:30 PM, Political Science office, Seigle Hall.

**Late exam/paper policy**
All due dates are stated above. Because of this, late papers and exams are frowned upon and carry a high penalty: one letter grade deduction for every day (or part thereof) that the paper is late. (Family or medical emergencies are the only exception and you must see me as soon as possible.) If you have any questions about this policy, or if anything is unclear, please don’t hesitate to speak with me.

**Plagiarism**
All written work submitted by students must be of their own creation and design. Any time someone else’s words are used to substantiate an argument, illustrate a point, or for any other reasons, they must be set off in quotation marks and a reference given where that quote may be found. Any time someone else’s ideas are paraphrased in new words, the original author and source must be cited in the same manner. Failure to do these and other basic rules of academic integrity as outlined in your student guide constitutes plagiarism.

If you are unsure whether a particular use of someone else’s words or ideas is a violation of these rules, please do not hesitate to ask me about it before submitting your work. If you are caught plagiarizing I will refer the matter to the academic integrity panel at the dean’s office. However, I reserve the right to impose a more serious penalty than that panel suggests, including failing a student for the entire class if any plagiarized work is submitted as a student’s own. I am not lenient in these matters.
Reading synopsis

I. Introduction: What is “Social Science?”


Recommended: Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, Introduction

Mon. 1/23: History of the Social Sciences:
*Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences*, pp. 1-93

Recommended:

** Dorothy Ross, “Changing Contours of the Social Science Disciplines.” MSS: Chapter 13, pp. 205-237


W. 1/25: Social Science 1: Examples from Economics and Political Science


M. 1/30: Social Science 2: Example from Sociology (History and Psychology)

** Solloway, *Born to Rebel*, Introduction and pp. 1-85

W. 2/1: Social Science 3: Example 1 from Anthropology

** Clifford Geertz, “Notes on a Ballenese Cockfight.”

M. 2/6: Social Science 4: Example 2 from Anthropology

** Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a Kung Woman.*
  Chapter 5: Trial Marriages
  Chapter 6: Marriage
  Chapter 7: Wives and Co-Wives

W. 2/8: August Comte, *Introduction to Positive Philosophy*


II. The Aim and Structure of Science
M 2/13
The Aim of Science 1.
Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*

W 2/15
The Aim of Science 2.
Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*
Chapters 5-7 pp. 58-110. (Chapters 8 and 9 recommended)

M 2/20
The Structure of Science 1: Positivism, part 1

*Recommended Reading:*


W 2/22
The Structure of Science 2: Positivism, part 2
Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*, Chapters 5-6

*Recommended:*

**Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation.”

M 2/27
The Structure of Science 3: Falsification

*Recommended:*
Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, Chapter 4

W 2/29
The Structure of Science 4:

*Recommended: Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, Chapters 3 and 4

** Take Home Exams distributed by Friday, March 2. **

M 3/5
Verification and Causation in Practice: The role of probability

*Recommended:*
Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, Chapters 13 and 14

W 3/7


**Jerome Mathis, “Deliberation with Evidence.” American Political Science Review, Vo. 105, No. 3.**

*First Take Home Exam Due Friday, March 9, Noon, in Political Science Office, Seigle Hall.*

**III. Translating Natural Science to Social Phenomena: Hopes and Cautions**

### Hopes

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Chapters 1 (including appendix), 2 and 3. |
| M 3/26 | John Searle, *Making the Social World*  
Chapters 5-7 |
| W 3/28 | **NO CLASS****        |
| M 4/2  | Searle, Continued.     |
Chapter 1: “Why ask what?”  
Chapter 2: “Too Many Metaphors.” |

*Second Take Home Exam will be distributed by Friday, 4/6.*

Chapter 4: “Madness: Biological or Constructed?”  
Chapter 5: “Kind-making: The Case of Child Abuse.” |

### Cautions

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| W 4/11 | Interpretation and intentionality  
** Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Science of Man,” pp. 33-81 |

** Recommended:**


** Clifford Geertz, “Notes on a Ballenese Cockfight.”
**Michelle Z. Rosaldo, “Moral/Analytic Dilemmas Posed by the Intersection of Feminism and Social Science”

**Max Weber, “Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy”

**Second Midterm Exam Due, Friday, April 13 at Noon.

M 4/16 **Isaiah Berlin, “The Concept of Scientific History”; and “The Sciences and the Humanities” (sections I and II).

Recommended: **Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “First Discourse on the Arts and Sciences”

Remainders: Theory, practice and society


Final Paper Due: May 7, 12:30 PM.